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ABSTRACT

Can a structure be created that provides a broader and more valid base for the general education curriculum in the social studies than would the structure of social science disciplines? One alternative would be to focus on the making of decisions about public issues as the crucial element of citizenship behavior in a democracy. Using the common threefold defintion, the structure would involve: 1) subject or field --making and affecting policy decisicns in this society; 2) substantive concepts --those useful in describing and understanding the issues and the context in which decisicns about them must be made; and, 3) syntactical or methodological concepts --those useful in arriving at rationally justified policy decisions. The social sciences have much to contribute to understanding crucial issues, but so do ethics, logic, and the humanities. In addition, some research evidence suggests that concepts will be better retained and more readily transferred to the non-classroom public controversy setting if the relevance of the concepts to handling an array of issues important to the society and to the student is made clear. It is clear that a citizenship education curriculum must be based on more than the structure of the social sciences, and must be developed at a level above that of the individual course. (Author/SBE)

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

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THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION*

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After decades of relative inactivity, the number of curriculum development projects in the social studies has increased markedly since 1955. Previously, the social studies educator could speculate at his leisure about the appropriate content and sequence for the social studies program. Now, however, as federal money makes curricular work possible on a large scale and as new curricula become available, perplexing questions about the rationale for and the substance of the social studies program take on a certain urgency.

As to rationale, one thing is clear on a general level, however. The social studies has long staked its claim--perhaps because of the lack of any other clear mandate--to a large portion of the school's responsibility for citizenship education. This concern was reflected in the Report of the American Historical Association's Committee of Seven in 1899,[1] even though it assumed that the teaching of history alone was sufficient to the task. The National Education Association's Committee on the Social Studies maintained the citizenship orientation in its 1916 report, but considered history as only one discipline with a contribution to make to the social studies program.[2] The work of the Commission on Social Studies of the

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*This paper is based in part on a chapter in the book, Teaching Public Issues in the High School, by Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver, to be released by Houghton Mifflin in early 1966.

[1]Committee of Seven. The Study of History in the Schools: Report to the American Historical Association. New York: Macmillan, 1899.

[2]See, "The Social Studies in Secondary Education." (Compiled by Arthur William Dunn.) U. S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 28, 1916.

American Historical Association[3] in the 1930's and of the National Council for the Social Studies' Committee on Concepts and Values[4] has continued the emphasis.

Over the years, citizen education goals have been stated largely in terms of providing students with information and intellectual competencies necessary to participate rationally in the resolution of public issues. The basic premise has been that our form of government, call it a democracy or a republic, demands an intelligent, informed citizenry because individual citizens have an impact on important governmental decisions. Many have questioned the assumption that the electorate does have the power attributed to it by the citizenship education model.[5] There also have been grave doubts as to the effectiveness of the public school and its social studies program in promoting an informed, an intelligent, or a concerned citizenry.

The 1916 committee of the NEA not only postulated citizenship education as the central goal of social studies instruction, but proposed a sequence of courses for the secondary school. In general form, that sequence is familiar to all of us who are American schooled because it has provided the pattern for the social studies program for fifty years. With few variations, the geography, U. S. history, (sometimes state history), civics,

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[3]See, e.g., Charles A. Beard. A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools (Report of the Committee on the Social Studies of the American Historical Association, Part I). New York: Scribner, 1934.

[4]Report of the NCSS Committee on Concepts and Values. A Guide to Content in the Social Studies. Washington, D. C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1957.

[5]For example: C. Wright Mills. The Power Elite. New York: Oxford University Press, 1965; Fred M. Newmann. "Consent of the Governed and Citizenship Education in Modern America." School Review, 1963, 71, pp. 404-424.

world or ancient history, U. S. history, and problems of democracy sequence is followed with amazing uniformity throughout the country. Despite pronouncements of intent, however, history for history's sake has continued to dominate social studies teaching. Social studies content has borne little relation to stated citizenship objectives, unless one assumes that coverage of historical generalizations of doubtful validity[6] and commonly superficial background treatments of societal problems are likely to affect the desired results. There is not much hope for the validity of this assumption on either logical or empirical grounds.

Structure Enters the Picture

It will be recalled that following the oft mentioned first sputnik, the initial flow of curriculum development funds from the national government was into the revamping of the science and mathematics curricula, supporting projects such as the Physical Science Study Committee (PSSC) and the School Mathematics Study Group (SMSG). The task was clear: Make secondary school science courses legitimate in terms of the conceptualization of their fields by competent scholars. Thus began an emphasis on use of the "structure" of a discipline as a basis for curriculum development.

Although others had utilized this approach previously, Bruner cannonized the principle in The Process of Education.[7] The basic notion is that if the scholar analyzes the structure of his discipline, that is, makes clear

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[6]See: H. J. Noah, C. E. Prince, and D. R. Riggs. "History in High School Textbooks." School Review, 1962, 70, pp. 415-436. Also, F. R. Hartz. "Watered-Down American History." High School Journal, 1963, 46, pp. 175-178.

[7]Jerome S. Bruner. The Process of Education. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960.

the field of study, the substantive concepts used in thinking about the field, the methodological concepts used in studying or investigating the field, as well as the interrelationships among the various concepts, and this analysis is used as the basis for constructing the curriculum, two important educational results will follow: (1) The structure, in some legitimate form, can be taught to any age pupil; and (2) the relationships among concepts will be made more clear to the student, so that an unfolding of meaning will occur in moving through the curriculum and the concepts will be better learned and retained.

Structure and the Social Studies

With the involvement of the scientists and mathematicians in secondary school curriculum development, two events occurred of great importance to the social studies. First, considerable success with the "structure approach" was reported in science and mathematics; and, second, social scientists, undoubtedly in part because of the availability of money, began to become involved in curriculum development for the elementary and secondary schools. With their considerable conscious striving to be "scientific" and considering the curricular successes claimed by their counterparts in the biological and physical sciences, it is not surprising that much of the curriculum work of social scientists has centered on using the structure of their scholarly fields as the basis for course construction.

There is no question but the increased involvement of social scientists in the development of public school curricula has been a most fortunate happening. The problems of curriculum development are so difficult and complex that the input of additional competencies can only be beneficial, especially as it encourages diversity in approaches to the curriculum and

brings scholarly competence to a field too broad for any one teacher to master.

It is noteworthy that the entrance of the social scientist upon the scene has posed particular problems for the historian and, in particular, the history teacher in the secondary school. The dispute as to whether history belongs to the social sciences or the humanities is far from resolved. And, it is evident that to participate in the trend toward the analysis of structure[8] as a basis for the curriculum, history must be conceived of as basically a social science, with the historian's task the development of conceptual systems by which events can be ordered and related--or to put it another way, by which hypotheses can be developed and tested. Few historians or teachers of history are willing to adopt this view wholeheartedly.

Structure and Citizenship Education

The "structure" approach also raises crucial questions more directly related to citizenship education. The most basic one is simply, Will a curricular sequence made up of courses based on the structure of the social sciences provide adequate citizenship education? Certainly the knowledge the social sciences have to offer about the behavior of individuals and groups has much to contribute to an informed citizenry. And, many would argue that the contributions the social sciences have to make to the decision-making process through their highly developed techniques for verifying knowledge are even more important. But, is the scientific frame too parochial a view of problem formulation and solution? Is the social

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[8]A report by Edwin Fenton and John Good indicates that this is currently the most popular basis for curriculum development in the social studies: "Project Social Studies: A Progress Report." Social Education 1965, 29, pp. 206-208.

scientist justified in imposing as the major ends of general education his commitments to inquiry and to the quest for knowledge within the highly specialized frameworks found in the work of those formally engaged in scholarship? The answer is clearly "yes" to the first question and "no" to the second.

In the first place, social scientists do not agree among themselves as to the essential concepts or the appropriate ordering the emphasis of concepts in their respective fields; nor do they agree on the possibility of a structure encompassing all of the social sciences. This lack of unanimity, while the essence of the academic pursuit, raises perplexing questions about which structures are to form the basis of the courses in the general education program. What criteria are to be used in selecting them? Or, is any structure appropriate as long as it has been carefully reasoned out by a recognized scholar? It is doubtful that many social scientists or educationists would respond affirmatively to the latter question.

Perhaps of more importance to those concerned with citizenship education, however, is the reasonable doubt as to whether the norms and intellectual styles preferred by scholars in their work are appropriate to the participant-citizen. While the vocabulary of the social scientist, especially that of the economist, is fast becoming a part of public discourse, there are serious questions about the extent to which the "layman" can transfer the social scientist's concepts and find them useful in the dialogue concerning public issues. Moreover, the social scientist himself has not made such clear and compelling contributions to clarifying or

resolving public issues[9] as to suggest that his mode of thought should be adopted as <u>the</u> model to be used as the basis for citizenship education. To what extent is Adams' poignant reaction to the academician's utility to the society in dealing with its crucial problems still pertinent today?

> The lecture room was futile enough, but the faculty room was worse. American society feared total wreck in the maelstrom of political and corporate administration, but it could not look for help to college dons. Adams knew, in that capacity, both Congressmen and professors, and he preferred Congressmen.[10]

It is possible that the narrowness of the scholar's intellectual frame may as often block as facilitate the perception of public issues. Gunnar Myrdal, in his classic study of the Negro in America,[11] notes a paradox that is both interesting and significant for the social studies educator; this is, that people often behave in specific situations in ways that seem to belie their general commitments to American ideals. For instance, a person who believes in the notion of full participation by citizens in a democracy may act to deny Negroes the right to vote. Myrdal's observation is keen and fits well with common and psychological knowledge about inconsistency in beliefs and behavior, but it does not go far enough when one is considering intellectual strategies for making decisions about public policy. Not only do specific values conflict with general ones, but general values conflict with one another when used as the basis for

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[9]Gunnar Myrdal's, <u>An American Dilemma</u> (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944), is a noteworthy successful attempt to clarify a public issue, but it is doubtful that his work has had any great effect on public thought.

[10]Henry Adams. <u>The Education of Henry Adams</u>. New York: Random House, 1931, p. 307.

[11]Myrdal, <u>op. cit</u>.

specific decisions. Civil rights laws have been supported in the name, for example, of equal opportunity; they have also been opposed in the name of private property rights and the right to local control.

It is rare that making policy about major issues does not involve this confrontation between basic values of our society.[12] How does social science methodology meet the citizen's need to determine appropriate ends or to choose between competing values? Charles Beard has an answer to this question in his treatise on the social sciences:

> Now we come to the second question raised by tensions and changes in society: What choices should be made in contingencies? Here the social sciences, working as descriptive sciences with existing and becoming reality, face, unequivocally, ideas of value and choice--argumentative systems of social philosophy based upon conceptions of desirable changes in the social order. At this occurrence empiricism breaks down absolutely. It is impossible to discover by the fact-finding operation whether this or that change is desirable. Empiricism may disclose within limits, whether a proposed change is possible, or to what extent it is possible, and the realities that condition its eventuation, but, given possibility or a degree of possibility, empiricism has no way of evaluating a value without positing value or setting up a frame of value.[13]

Beard's analysis is as valid today as it was in 1934; and he does not stand alone in his assessment. Many scholars (e.g., Stevenson, Hospers,

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[12]For a fuller development of this point, see: Donald W. Oliver and James P. Shaver. The Analysis of Public Controversy: An Approach to Citizenship Education. Report of cooperative Research Project No. 551. Cambridge, Mass.: The Laboratory for Research in Instruction, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1963 (mimeo.), Parts I and II. Also, Oliver and Shaver. Teaching Public Issues in the High School, op. cit.

[13]Charles Beard. The Nature of the Social Sciences. New York: Scribner, 1934, pp. 171-172.

Ewing and Russell[14]), while not in agreement on the specific process to be followed in making ethical decisions, agree with Beard that while the method of the scientist is in some measure useful in the process of ethical judgment, it is not sufficient alone.

It should be obvious that several different modes of endeavor and thought are relevant to a citizenship education curriculum that emphasizes confronting societal controversy. Identifying and synthesizing these modes into a curricular pattern is a major challenge to the social studies educator and other scholars who will work with him. Examples of alternative modes that might be considered are the poet-historian who helps to provide societal continuity and cohesion through his dramatic and poetic representations of past glories, the broad-ranging philosopher who raises questions about the criteria for intellectual truth and questions established standards of good and bad, the lawyer-statesman who is actively engaged in confronting the issues facing society, and the intelligent journalist whose concern is for the objective reporting of important contemporary events in historical and ethical perspective. Considering the attitudinal and tempermental as well as intellectual objectives of citizenship education, exclusive focus on the academic scholar as the model for an intelligent citizenry seems clearly inadequate.

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[14]Charles L. Stevenson. Ethics and Language. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944, pp. 113-114; John Hospers. An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953, p. 494; E. C. Ewing. "Subjectivism and Naturalism in Ethics." In Readings in Ethical Theory, edited by W. E. Sellers and John Hospers. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1952, p. 120; Bertrand Russell, "The Elements of Ethics." in Sellers and Hospers, ibid., p. 8.

What of the Student's Models?

There is another assumption that goes with the structure approach to curriculum building that is troublesome. A course based on structure seems to assume that the student comes into the classroom with his mind a tabula rasa so far as social theory is concerned. The educational task is to paint on the tabula the adequate framework for construing society. In reality, of course, the student comes to the classroom with his own social theory, as incomplete, fragmented, and otherwise inadequate as it may be. The task of the teacher is to help him explore and go beyond his present speculations about what makes people and societies function as they do. And, the subject-matter of the social sciences is likely to have an impact on the student's thinking as it is related to his already existing concepts. The identification of crucial concepts for understanding society is a significant task. However, the extent to which the concepts are related to the student's existing frame of reference is a more likely basis for predicting the success of a social science course than is its faithfulness to some conception of structure in the scholarly field. To ignore the student, except as his interests and background can be utilized for "motivational" purposes in communicating the previously determined structure, is a dubious, if not haphazard and possibly disastrous, approach to curriculum building. But to accept the existence, relevance, and, to a considerable extent, the validity of the frame of reference brought to class by the student is also to concede that the result of instruction cannot be a replication in the student's mind of the social scientist's model. The outcome will be instead an intellectual framework that is largely idiosyncratic to the individual student, but

nevertheless valid for his own purposes of construing and relating to his social reality.

No Place for the Structure Notion?

If these reservations about the structure of the social sciences as a basis for general education in the social studies have some merit, is the idea of structure of no use to one concerned with the development of curricula for citizenship education? This depends to a large extent upon the concept of structure which one adopts. It is all too easy to fall into the error of talking about structure as if it were something inherent in nature, revealing itself as the scientist investigates his field. It is one thing to say that there is order in nature (including society as a "natural" setting for man), but quite another to say that the dividing of reality into segments for study--the basis for a discipline--reflects any natural order. The structure of a social science discipline is the result of man's efforts to study an arbitrarily defined field and of his analysis of the results of that study.

Looking at structure from this point of view raises a question of considerable importance to the social studies curriculum: Can a structure be created that provides a broader and more valid base for the general education curriculum than would the structure of social science disciplines? One alternative, as has been implied earlier in this paper, would be to focus on the making of decisions about public issues as the crucial element of citizenship behavior in a democracy.[15] Using the common threefold

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[15]See Oliver and Shaver, op. cit.

definition,[16] the structure would involve: (1) subject or field--making and affecting policy decisions in this society; (2) substantive concepts--those useful in describing and understanding the issues and the context in which decisions about them must be made; and, (3) syntactical, or methodological, concepts--those useful in arriving at rationally justified policy decisions. Obviously, the social sciences have much to contribute to the recognition and understanding of crucial issues, to the intellectual strategies adopted for determining desirable and possible policies, and to the procedures for affecting and implementing policy decisions. But so do ethics and logic; and, to the extent that certain commitments are prerequisite to functioning rationality, so do other humanities.

It may well be that even in the overall context of a curricular sequence based on the analysis of decision-making in a pluralistic-democratic society, social science concepts can be taught best with individual courses based on the structure of the individual social science disciplines. It is, however, difficult not to suspect that the motivational effects social scientists, including Jerome Bruner, assume their structured courses will have for restless and often non-intellectually inclined, if not anti-intellectual, children and adolescents is largely an unwarranted projection of the excitement and satisfaction they derive from their own investigations and models for construing reality. There is, moreover, some research evidence suggesting that concepts will be better retained and more readily transferred to the non-classroom public

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[16]Joseph J. Schwab. "The Concept of the Structure of a Discipline." Educational Record, 1962, 43, pp. 197-205. Also, Joseph J. Schwab. "Structure of the Disciplines: Meanings and Significances." In The Structure of Knowledge and the Curriculum, edited by G. W. Ford and Lawrence Pugno. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964, pp. 6-30.

controversy setting if the relevance of the concepts to handling an array of issues important to the society and to the student is made clear. Perhaps courses based on structure could conclude with exercises in application of the social science concepts to public issues. This would, however, affront the "purist" social scientist who believes either that application automatically follows comprehension or that concern with application to citizenship problems contaminated the structure of the discipline. Some cyclical approach (not the present U. S. history course cycle of more of the same) might be used to introduce the student to the new dimensions of important public issues brought to light by the concepts introduced in each succeeding course. Possibly, however, the answer is a course sequence in which important concepts are introduced as relevant to crucial public issues, without individual social science (or ethics or logic) courses. The answers to the questions posed by such general proposals present the curriculum developer and researcher with problems of overwhelming complexity and difficulty.

Conclusion

It is patently clear, nevertheless, if one looks at the nature of the scientific endeavor with its limited intent, methodology, and subject-matter and contrasts this with the manifold demands of making rational decisions about public issues, that a citizenship education curriculum must be based on much more than the structure of the social sciences. At the same time, the current emphasis on building curricula based on the structure of disciplines is antithetical to citizenship education only if the intent is to have the general education social studies program made up exclusively of social science courses. If we can develop structures at a level above

that of the individual course, such as a rationale derived from consideration of the elements in an adequate conceptual frame for making decisions about public issues, social science courses developed from the structure approach might well fit into the overall curriculum scheme.

Alternatives to courses based on individual social sciences are available, however. Perhaps rather than worrying about the structures of their scholarly areas and whether these will be taught in some specified form in the public schools, social scientists could make a greater contribution to an intelligent citizenry by asking, as have the Anthropology Curriculum Study Project[17] and the Sociological Resources for Secondary Schools Project,[18] what their areas of study can contribute to an understanding of the crucial issues facing our nation both internally and internationally. This, rather than the preservation of arbitrary intellectual domains, should be the central concern for citizenship education.

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